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SUBJECT: ELECTION 2008: RACE NARROWS WITH ONE WEEK TO GO

REF: A. OTTAWA 1293  
1B. TORONTO 288  
1C. OTTAWA 1258  
1D. OTTAWA 1216  
1E. OTTAWA 632

11. (SBU) Summary: Canada's major political parties have launched their final push to Election Day on October 14. Although the Conservative government appears certain to be re-elected, whether it will win a majority or another minority mandate is less clear. The apparent slowing of Conservative momentum, the corresponding resurgence of the separatist Bloc in Quebec, and the prospect of strategic voting by those seeking to block a Conservative majority make the shape of the next House of Commons unpredictable. The remaining nine days will be crucial in firming up voting intentions, and the parties will likely expend the greatest part of their advertising budget on a last blitz to move the polls. End summary.

THE LAST-MINUTE RUSH

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12. (U) The majority of Canadians voters usually do not tune in until the second half of an election campaign. Successive studies show that up to 20 percent of Canadian voters wait until the final week to make up their minds, while approximately 14 percent decide on Election Day itself. This encourages a peak in political advertising in the final week of the campaign as parties try to nail down these wavering voters. The fact that this election will fall on the day after Canada's Thanksgiving holiday, however, may limit politicians' ability to grab voters' attention.

THE POLLS

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13. (U) As of October 6, most pollsters showed the Conservatives winning a minority government, but slipping from a high of 41 percent (majority territory) in the second week of the 36 day campaign. These polls peg Conservative support at between 32 and 37 per cent nationally, at or below the 36 percent of the popular vote the party won in 2006. They attribute the decline to an erosion of support in Quebec, rising anxiety over the economy, and criticism of PM Harper's "steady as she goes" approach to turmoil in international financial markets. While the race appears to be narrowing, however, Harper retains a decisive edge as voters' top choice for Prime Minister (34 percent to Dion's 20 percent), and leads all his rivals with an overall leadership index score of 95 percent on trust, competence and national vision compared to 51 percent for Dion.

14. (U) Mainstream polls indicate Liberal support between 23 and 31 per cent, at or below the 30 percent of the vote the party won in the 2006 election. The New Democratic Party (NDP) appears to have picked up some momentum, rising from 19 to 21 percent over three days in one tracking poll, slightly

ahead of the 17 percent it won in 2006. The Green Party meanwhile polls between 10 and 12 percent. Ipsos suggests that the Bloc Quebecois surged eight points since last week to 40 percent in Quebec largely on the strength of falling Conservative support in that province.

OTHER MEASURES

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15. (U) In addition to mainstream pollsters, election stock market indexes and blogs are providing alternative tools to gauge likely voter preferences. The University of British Columbia's non-profit Election Stock Market permits buyers to purchase "shares" in the political parties, betting on which party they believe will win. "Investors" can wager a minimum of \$25 and a maximum of \$1,000. The index in 2006 beat 3 of 4 major national pollsters in predicting the final election results. Just one week before the election, it puts Conservative support at 45 percent with 141 seats, the Liberals at 26 percent with 79 seats, the NDP at 18 percent QLiberals at 26 percent with 79 seats, the NDP at 18 percent and 42 seats, and the Bloc Quebecois with 14 percent nationally and 43 seats.

COMMENT

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16. (SBU) Intense media focus on daily poll fluctuations can become "meaningless noise," making it difficult to discern the larger national picture. The regional nature of many races, tight three-way contests in key urban constituencies in the battleground provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, and the parties' ability to get out their vote will

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be essential factors in determining Canada's next government. The opposition vote is fragmented, opening up opportunities for strategic voting and last-minute switching, especially by Green supporters. The effect of the timing of the holiday weekend and the rate of voter participation (64.7 percent in 2006 and expected to be lower in this election) are also unknown, making seat predictions hard to call. However, if the current polls are accurate, the final results could mirror the outcome of the 2006 election, and ultimately reflect the essential stagnation in the polls over the past two and-a-half years. End comment.

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